

Bush under fire over global AIDS funding.

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[Reuters Health E-Line](#)

English

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - AIDS advocacy groups said on Wednesday **President Bush's** proposed budget for next year would cut assistance by almost two-thirds to the U.N.-backed Global Fund to Fight AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, threatening its operations in Africa.

In the fiscal 2005 budget he will send to Congress on Monday, Bush is expected to propose \$2.7 billion to combat global AIDS - disappointing AIDS groups that had expected at least \$3 billion.

Of the \$2.7 billion, an estimated \$200 million would go to the Global Fund, down from \$550 million in the current year, according an African relief group known as DATA, with which Irish pop star Bono is associated.

DATA's executive director, Jamie Drummond, accused the Bush administration of "robbing Peter to pay Paul," and warned that the cutbacks threatened the Global Fund's ability to continue programs already in place, as well as new grants.

The White House said Bush was not backing away from his commitment to support the fund. "The Global Fund is an important part of the president's plan and there will be a steady and sustained commitment to the Global Fund," a White House official said.

RESULTS, a grass-roots health advocacy organization, said U.S. money should be front-loaded to combat the spreading crisis.

Bush a year ago pledged \$15 billion to help combat HIV/AIDS in Africa and the Caribbean - effectively tripling U.S. spending over five years.

He touted the initiative during a July visit to Africa, where almost 30 million people live with the disease, including 3 million children under the age of 15.

At \$2.7 billion, the 2005 budget request would top the \$2.4 billion backed by Congress for the current fiscal year.

Bush's AIDS initiative calls for providing antiviral treatment to HIV-positive people in Africa and the Caribbean who cannot afford it. It would also help children who have lost one or both parents and work toward prevention with programs aimed at sexual abstinence, education and promotion of condom use.